

Jefferson Leader Rolls with Changes

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"I'm willing to take the hits, whatever they are."

Dudley has held five principal positions in the past seven years. He explains that the constant shuffle in his career isn't by choice. Currently he rents an apartment at Jantzen Beach in north Portland without his wife, who still lives in Dallas. He says he doesn't know when his spouse will join him.

With his track record, will Dudley be the principal of today's freshmen, the graduating class of 2010?

"Ooh, I'd love that," Dudley said. "People ask me weekly, 'why would you come here, why would you do this?' I tell them I'm purpose-driven."

But he entered his position somewhat ill informed: He hadn't even read his contract before arriving, and having never walked the Jefferson halls, the school's diminutive staff and lack of structural basics like a public address system shocked him.

"What I am accustomed to doesn't even come close to what I have here," he said.

He began implementing changes in early fall by closing the campus during lunch. He has locked the doors to all but two main entrances, and requires students and staff to wear ID tags around their necks.

He's added staff to the main office, and the district's introduction of a business manager for Jefferson and Wilson High School clusters has redirected issues that kept staff from their job focus. Business manager Reis Wilbanks holds the position



A no-nonsense style has earned Jefferson High School Principal Leon Dudley admiration from many but has also brought new tensions to the school serving north and northeast Portland.

PHOTO BY PETER FRANZEN/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

at both schools, acting as liaison between teaching and administrative staff and the district office, and dealing with budgeting issues and volunteering schedules.

Dudley has also detailed a plan to "get rolling" by adding four key staff positions — an extra security official posted at the school's Kerby Avenue entrance, a registrar to track attendance, a dean of instruction to focus on curriculum and instruction (in addition to the two deans of discipline), and a community liaison.

Phillips said the district has worked with

Jefferson in placing leaders at the four new academies, and is exploring grants for technology equipment such as a PA system, despite an "extraordinarily flat" budget this year.

But Dudley's focus for his first school year is more fundamental—he wants to build relationships with students and staff. He is aware many students and teachers don't trust him, and knows biases are stacked high against any principal.

But the chilly reception isn't just aimed at the principal. Arriving as a new staff mem-

ber, Wilbanks observed that much of the staff would not talk to her or each other.

"They would just stare at me," she said. "The students could feel it."

Dudley says the only way to get results is to break down these barriers. He has created a parent contact log and has a color-coded folder documenting times, dates, addresses and phone numbers of every student he meets with.

He regularly meets with Portland Community College Cascade President Algie Gatewood to increase the two schools'

partnership. He also says he's already improved involvement of the Parent Teacher Association and the Jefferson site-based decision council, whom he described as previously marginalized.

"My report card for him is good so far," said Glenda Walker, president of the Jefferson PTSA. "I'm trying to understand his vision. We too have visions, and hopefully his direction will be one we agree with."

Dudley is especially proud of a series of staff retreats, the second and most recent one taking place near the Columbia River Gorge and attended by 32 staff members and parents.

These weekend getaways are meant to "define a mission and the vision." A third retreat is planned for March.

"We spent 11 hours over the weekend talking about trust at Jefferson," he said. "We were not having those kinds of conversations here. That was huge and you can feel it."

This year's seniors have seen changes in leadership, staff and in academic structure nearly every year of their high school career. Some say they don't like the rules Dudley has brought to the school, but they appreciate his efforts to engage with them when he's not away at conferences or visiting family back in Texas.

"He's trying to do a lot but he can't," said senior Lillian Peters. "Everybody is trying to bring him down."

Senior Kemiya Hunt said she feels he has brought about improvements, "but after so long, how can you change things so quickly?"

Focus on Civil Rights, Art and Jazz

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culture, Weston counts Cecil Payne, Coleman Hawkins, Duke Ellington, and Thelonious Monk among his friends and teachers.

Robin D.G. Kelley, a widely respected African American scholar, activist and author, will present a talk titled "Jazz and freedom go hand in hand: Thelonious Monk plays the '60s." on Monday, Feb. 12 at 8 p.m. at Reed's Vollum Lecture Hall.

Kelley's work as a historian is focused on the black working class and the

neoconservative demonization of the urban poor. He is a professor of history and African and American studies and ethnicity at USC. His current project—a biography of Thelonious Monk—results from years of support from the Monk family, including unprecedented access to the Monk Institute's historical documents and archives.

Once again, the Portland Jazz Festival and Reed College team up to present "The Incredible Journey of Jazz"—a special program designed for school-age children and their parents—as a free, public perfor-



"Confrontation at the Bridge" depicts the 1965 civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala. The original silkscreen print by the late African American artist Jacob Lawrence is on view at Reed College for Black History Month.

mance on Monday, Feb. 19 at 2 p.m. in Kaul Auditorium.

This 75-minute program presented by the Leroy Vinnegar Jazz Institute tells the story of jazz from its roots in African music and culture, through its development in the United States, to its current role as one of America's most treasured contributions to world culture.

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